

Free screening of "Libby, Montana" is Wednesday, March 3, in Libby

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A Missoula-based film company is offering a free, pre-release showing of its newest non-fiction movie, *Libby, Montana*, in Libby this week. The 152-minute movie attempts to address the asbestos situation in Libby that has been in the news since November, 1999.

Libby, Montana is from High Plains Films and will be screened at two pre-release "sneak preview" showings in Libby and Missoula. The directors, Drury Carr and Doug Hawes-Davis, will be present at both screenings to

months and be done with the film in about a year. But once we got there, all of that went out the window. We realized the story of Libby, Montana was just starting to unfold," Carr said.

What: *Libby, Montana*, a documentary movie

Where: The Dome, 602 Mineral Ave., Libby

When: Wednesday, March 3 at 7:00 p.m.

Cost: Free

The filmmakers spent the next 2½ years filming, documenting the local efforts to uncover the extent of the exposure and the difficulties in cleaning up the town.

As more and more people were diagnosed with asbestos-related disease, W.R. Grace & Co., the company responsible for the con-

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Movie

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into a traditional chronological drama.

In the 1920s, the Zonolite Company began mining and processing vermiculite, an ore found in insulation and commercial potting soil around the world. For decades, workers brought dust-laden clothes home to their families. But what workers and townspeople were never told — and what W. R. Grace and federal and state officials knew but kept secret — was that the dust was a particularly lethal form of asbestos found as a contaminant in the vermiculite.

Nearly 1,500 people in Libby have been diagnosed with some form of asbestos-related lung disease and the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry estimates that approximately one-third of the population has some type of lung abnormality. With the EPA's sporadic and incomplete cleanup, asbestos exposure may still be occurring throughout the town; in homes,

schools, playgrounds and yards.

The Environmental Protection Agency calls Libby the worst case of community-wide exposure to a toxic substance in U.S. history.

While the filmmakers continued to document the history of the town and the clean-up efforts of the federal government, the story grew beyond Libby as congressional leaders in Washington, DC, began debating what to do about the millions of homes and businesses in the U. S. that still contain vermiculite from Libby.

Emotions fly and solutions are hard to find in this disturbing yet strangely humorous true drama. *Libby, Montana* is a journey into the world of a hard-working, blue-collar community that exemplifies the American Dream gone horribly wrong.

Libby, Montana is the fourth feature-length project from High Plains Films. It was directed, produced, shot and edited by Carr and Hawes-Davis. The film features an original score from Birmingham, Ala., musician Ned Mudd. Montana musicians Aaron Parrett and Ivan Rosenberg also contributed music for the documentary.



Courtesy photo

In a scene from the documentary movie "Libby, Montana," Bob Dedrick of Libby looks at a temporary asbestos victims memorial last year at Libby cemetery. See related story on this page.

answer questions immediately after the film.

Libby, Montana will screen at the Dome Theater in Libby on Wednesday, March 3 at 7 p.m., and at the Wilma Theater in Missoula on Thursday, March 4 at 7 p.m.

Admission in Libby is free. Persons attending the Missoula showing must pay \$8 at the door.

The Libby screening is sponsored by the Montana Committee for the Humanities. The movie will not be officially released until later in the year. The filmmakers want to allow Western Montana residents to view the work before offering it to general audiences. A world premier venue and date will be announced later this spring.

In 1999, when news of possible large-scale asbestos contamination in Libby was reported by the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, Carr and Hawes-Davis began thinking of a film about the town. By early 2001, the story had grown to include a full-scale emergency cleanup by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

In April of 2001, filmmakers arrived in Libby for the first time.

"What I envisioned was spending a few weeks in Libby filming, doing interviews and going to some meetings, then edit for a few

tamination, declared bankruptcy and consequently began dropping asbestos victims from the one and only medical plan.

"Libby citizens often found themselves at odds with their own friends and neighbors on how to best deal with the crisis," Carr said. "Some prominent town members claimed the issue was blown out of proportion by a zealous few, including a young, charismatic federal bureaucrat in charge of cleanup."

"As we began to peel away the layers of a very complex situation, we realized that the federal officials who came to Libby to try to resolve this problem were an integral component of the evolving story. These people were putting their careers on the line in order to fight for the cleanup in Libby," said Hawes-Davis. "Federal EPA funding was being cut each year, and it began to take a toll on the Libby asbestos victims and the EPA staff. So the personal effort of Paul Peronard (on-site EPA emergency coordinator) became just as important as the stories of asbestos victims."

The result of Carr and Hawes-Davis' work is a film that unfolds at first like a mystery and evolves

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